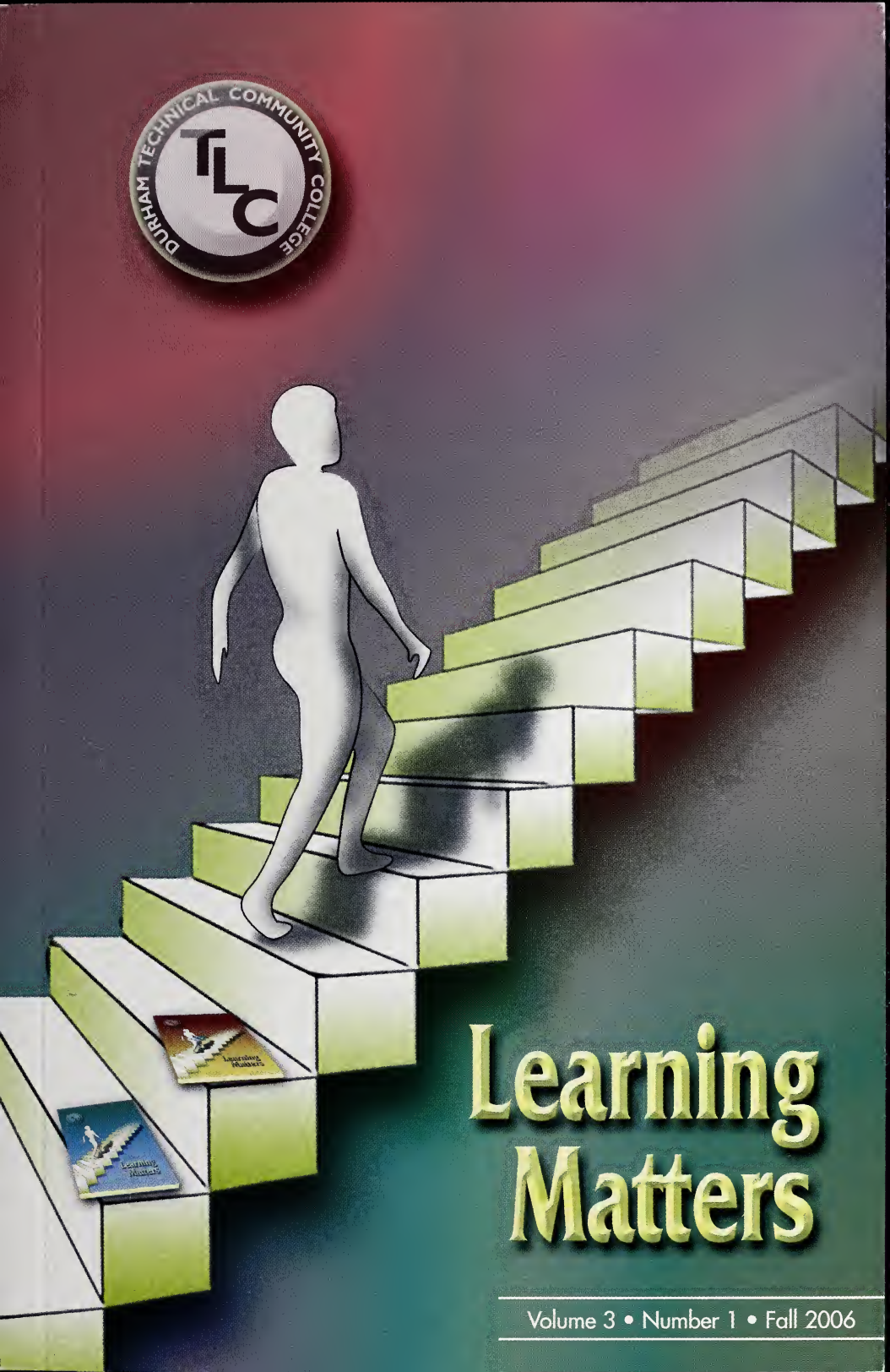
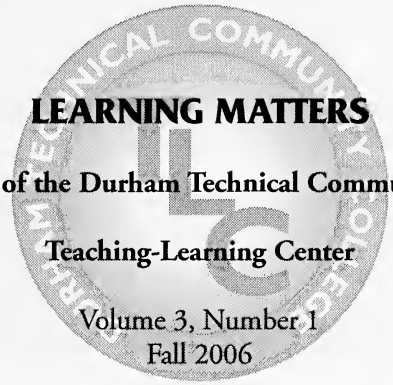


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Editor's Note

This volume of the *Learning Matters* Journal represents the best example of the scholarship of teaching because its articles are written by people who teach every day. Durham Tech is fortunate to have on its faculty and staff many talented teachers and learners who recognize the importance of sharing their knowledge and expertise in writing.

As always, the editorial skills of Dr. Thomas Gould, Associate Dean, University Transfer, have made this edition of *Learning Matters* possible. It is our great fortune to have him in our midst.

The Durham Technical Community College Teaching-Learning Center welcomes comments on this journal. Please contact Mary Anne Grabarek, Executive Dean, Instructional Services/Director of the Teaching-Learning Center at 991/686-3413 or **grabarekm@durhamtech.edu** to respond. Please visit the Teaching-Learning Center web site **http://courses.durhamtech.edu/tlc/** to view the rich array of resources available to faculty and staff.

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Introduction

William G. Ingram

For many, going to college is a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood-the severing of ties to the nuclear family and household, an exploration of the unknown, the development of new relationships, and (at least in theory) the discovery of what one wants to be once one "grows up." This has long been our traditional view of going to college, and it manifests itself in the many different reasons why people choose to attend one college over another. Some choose a college because of its distance or proximity from home. Others choose an institution based on its reputation for social development. Still others go to a school because that is where their friends have enrolled. Some are taken by the beauty of a campus, or the success of the football team, while others may be legacy enrollees, following in the footsteps of mom and dad. Often, we hope, an institution's reputation in a particular major influence a student. At the same time, however, we recognize that for theso-called "traditional" student, changing majors is common and in fact desirable.

Of course, we know that almost half of those enrolled in undergraduate education in the United States are enrolled in community colleges, and that for the vast majority of those students this vision of going to college really does not apply. Many of our students are older, with social, occupational, and family responsibilities. Often they have been on their own for some time. They are not going to college because that's what all their friends are doing. They probably haven't chosen their institution because the campus is in an idyllic setting or because they're fans of the basketball team, or (probably) even because of the college's reputation for producing successful graduates in a particular field. In all likelihood they are enrolled in a particular college because it's convenient-it is their community's college-and, more to the point, because they have come to recognize something in their lives can be better.

For some, that "something" might be a improving a skill they use in their current workplace. Others might need to develop a new set of skills, to re-enter the workforce or to achieve the next step on their career ladder. Some may hold ambitions to enter professions requiring an undergraduate degree and see the community college as the best and most affordable first step in meeting that ambition.

Community college students are a diverse lot. They are of many different ages, income levels, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, interests, experiences, skills, hopes, dreams, and fears. What is common about them is some need to change some aspect of their lives and recognition that the experiences on a college campus will enable them to affect that change.

In a similar vein, community college faculty members are not drawn to their careers because of the opportunities to discover new scientific knowledge or to develop new technologies. Community college faculty members aren't generally expected or rewarded for conducting research or for demonstrating their talents through artistic expression. The cure for cancer is not likely to be found in a community college laboratory. We should not expect the next Pulitzer Prize to be awarded to a faculty member on a community college campus.

Like their students, community college faculties are diverse groups. They are comprised of mathematicians, automotive technicians, biologists, nurses, social scientists, accountants, poets, and computer programmers. And, like their students, community college faculty members share the common realization that their particular knowledge, skills, and talents can provide opportunities for their students to improve their lives. Community college faculty members and the staff members who support them are agents of change.And the label we apply to this intentional change is "learning." At Durham Technical Community College, **learning matters.**

This third edition of "*Learning Matters*," published by the Durham Technical Community College Teaching and Learning Center, is dedicated to the notion that the most important activity on our campus is learning, and that our primary role, whether we are students, faculty, staff, or administrators, is to be a **learner**. Meaningful and intentional change is not easy and can be uncomfortable and even painful. But in today's world, being able to change, to adapt to changes that occur around us, and to help others change in meaningful and intentional ways is essential for survival. Now more than ever, **learning matters**.

Aha!: Timing and the Facilitation of Student Discovery of Voice in the Story of America

Tracy M. Constantine

"Observe due measure, for right timing is in all things the most important factor." – Hesiod

Joining me one day on an after-hours errand at the office, my eight-year-old son, Noah, asked what he could read while I finished working. I glanced at the bookshelf and reached for the closest thing to children's literature I could find, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* "This will be a hard read," I said, "but it's a classic story by Mark Twain about a boy and his friend on an adventure. Why don't you give it a try?"
Noah picked up the book and made his way through ten pages before we left. In the car I asked what he thought about the story so far.

"Well, Mom," he said, "there was a word in there I'm not supposed to say that started with an N."

Of course: the forbidden fruit had captured his attention. "Yes," I acknowledged. "That was a word people used in the American South in the 1830s and 1840s, when the story of *Huckleberry Finn* takes place. We wouldn't use that word now, though; it would be perceived as an insult. We might say 'Black' or 'African American,' right?"

He thought for a minute. And then it happened. Noah asked, "So, Mom, was Mark Twain calling Jim the N-word, or was Huckleberry Finn?" And then, a few years before I had anticipated it would happen, we began a conversation about narrative structure in fiction.

When I relayed the story to a colleague, she suggested that Noah had demonstrated a set of skills we humanities instructors hope to cultivate in our students. He thought critically about a story, synthesized what he had read with what he knew from past experience, and then asked questions that would help him make sense of the messages and inconsis-

tencies he had identified. He also possessed the poise and confidence to engage in the conversation. "But how do we teach that process?" my colleague asked.

Her question set my mind in motion. In the classroom, I would call Noah's experience an "Aha! moment" – a breakthrough moment when a number of stimuli converge and a student sees or understands a phenomenon with newfound clarity. Aha! moments, as the name suggests, exhilarate students with their apparent spontaneity, but my experience is that they must be carefully orchestrated. Just as with conducting a symphony (or telling a joke, for that matter) facilitating student discovery calls for a keen sense of timing.

In fact, a recent study about timing in orchestral conducting simulators offers a number of relevant insights that can serve as a model for designing assignments that encourage students to experience Aha! moments. The 2005 study, "Improving Orchestral Conducting Systems in Public Spaces: Examining the Temporal Characteristics and Conceptual Models of Conducting Gestures," seeks to understand issues of timing to improve computer-assisted, interactive conducting simulators.[1] In an effort to improve the design and effectiveness of interactive conducting simulators used in museums, public spaces, and educational settings, the authors studied the difference in response times between already trained conductors and untrained conductors using the simulators. They noticed that trained conductors anticipated the beat of the music and were thus able to keep up with the simulator more effectively. Untrained conductors exhibited a much higher variance in terms of keeping beat and consequently fell behind. The ultimate aim of the research was to "build an adaptive conducting system that adjusts to the user's conducting ability; this system would react precisely to a professional conductor's baton gestures, but still be forgiving to the potentially erratic gestures of an untrained conductor" (1).

[1] The study, by Eric Lee, Marius Wolf, and Jan Borchers of the Media Computing Group at RWTH Aachen University in Aachen, Germany, "compared how conductors and non-conductors place their beats when conducting to a fixed orchestral recording of *Radetzky March,* and found significant differences between these two groups." In this paper, I use the circumstances and results of the study as a metaphor for instructors' need to negotiate the different amounts of time it takes students to arrive at a satisfactory level of understanding by creating assignments that allow and adjust for those differences.

The metaphor of the conducting simulator extends easily to the variance in student response times in a traditional classroom setting. Imagine the humanities instructor who stands at the front of a classroom and asks a leading question to draw out student voices and encourage students to make connections between their readings or experiences and a new concept. It is not uncommon for one or two students to shoot up their hands and offer a quick — and often valid — answer, blocking out the opportunity for those students who may have needed a few moments to process the information or to muster the courage to come forth with a reply.

The simulator in this analogy is the activity itself — the question-and-answer format that calls for a prompt reaction. The first responders are akin to the trained conductors; they have experience and confidence, and they can anticipate the correct answer. In the conducting study, the authors acknowledge that "a user's level of familiarity with the musical piece, or his/her natural musical talent" can account for variations in response time and that "age may also be a factor" (8). Likewise, a number of factors can influence students' response time in a question-and-answer activity. They may be responding from memory because they have already learned the material[2] or they may be genuinely experiencing an Aha! moment. Particularly in the community college, age disparity of students can be a factor in response time. Older students respond more confidently and articulately on some matters, while younger students respond more enthusiastically to others. Regardless of the impetus, the early responders receive positive reinforcement from the instructor, who may promptly move on to the next sequential question. Some of the non-responding students in the classroom may be untrained conductors; they, perhaps for lack of understanding or need for more time, miss the beat and at the same time miss the opportunity to formulate a connection verbally and receive positive reinforcement. What's more, when the instructor moves on to the next question, these late responders may still be grappling with the previous concept, causing them to miss the next question or comment, and ultimately to lose track of the "beat" or the sequence of points that will create whole meaning.[3]

Other non-responders, of course, may know the answers already or may have made the intended connections without raising their hands. They

may be shy or reluctant participants in the activity. Their lack of engagement in the activity - even if they are making the intended connections — precludes the instructor from determining their levels of understanding. The assumption with the simulator is that all participants respond in some way to the prompts. The authors are clear: "It is important to emphasize that our intention is not to judge how well a person can conduct [; . . .] we hope to achieve [...] a measurement of how much conducting training a person has undergone, and adapt the system to their level of ability" (2). Likewise, in a traditional classroom, instructors invite participation not for the purpose of evaluating how well students have achieved certain learning outcomes, but to gauge students' level of comfort and familiarity with the material so that they can adapt subsequent questions and comments appropriately. Another objective in encouraging classroom participation in humanities classes is for students to discover their own voices and to practice expressing their insights and connections both confidently and competently.

The "adaptive conducting system" in the analogy must be the enhanced assignment or instructional delivery strategy that allows students with varying degrees of experience and ability to arrive at an understanding without falling behind or missing the "big picture." Beyond that, the strategy must encourage full or near-full participation so that instructors can measure the levels of engagement and comfort of as many students as possible and then use that information to adjust subsequent questions or activities. Timing becomes important from both the perspective of the instructor, who must adapt to the needs and responses of the students, and the perspective of the students, who must be given as little or much time as they need to engage in the process of discovery and express their insights.

[2] Thanks to Judy Gray for the insight that what may appear to be a revelation for an early responding student may merely be the regurgitation of something the student has learned in another setting or circumstance and committed to memory.

[3] Formal and informal descriptions of musical stumbling or failure to keep time align well with the experience of falling behind in an academic setting. For example, music instructor Pete Wernick explains that "most timing problems are not a matter of important slow-downs or speed-ups. They are when stumbles or uncertainties happen and the picker goes on without regard to the beat, and especially they are when a person doesn't realize he/she has added, or left out, some notes or spaces."

In Humanities 121 — The Nature of America, I have stumbled upon a number of activities that fit the "adaptive conducting system" model. One of the most effective to date has been a fieldwork assignment used to "discover" the complex story of Christopher Columbus. The context for the lesson is an overarching theme in the course: students must begin to approach the study of culture and identity in America with a skeptical (but not cynical) eye, because everything they read and hear is an argument. They must begin to identify the perspectives of the authors they read and determine whether there are biases or unanswered questions that arise. Then they must formulate questions and investigate to come up with an informed and balanced determination. In short, students cannot take everything they hear at face value — even if they hear it from history teachers or read it in history books in school.[4]

I set the stage for the assignment by projecting Billy Collins's poem "The History Teacher" on the wall:

> The History Teacher
>
> Trying to protect his students' innocence
> he told them the Ice Age was really just
> the Chilly Age, a period of a million years
> when everyone had to wear sweaters.
> And the Stone Age became the Gravel Age,
> named after the long driveways of the time.
> The Spanish Inquisition was nothing more
> than an outbreak of questions such as
> "How far is it from here to Madrid?"
> "What do you call the matador's hat?"
>
> The War of the Roses took place in a garden,
> and the Enola Gay dropped one tiny atom on Japan.
> The children would leave his classroom
> for the playground to torment the weak
> and the smart,

[4] Here, of course, I allude to James Loewen's wonderfully researched book *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong.*

mussing up their hair and breaking their glasses,
while he gathered up his notes and walked home
past flower beds and white picket fences,
wondering if they would believe that soldiers
in the Boer War told long, rambling stories
designed to make the enemy nod off.

Collins's poem introduces the idea that history lessons are sometimes watered down with the good intentions of protecting the innocence of children, but the benevolent deception can preclude important learning about history and the human condition that might produce better informed (and perhaps more humane) citizens. I then expose the students to the definition of "heroification" from James Loewen's introduction to *Lies My Teacher Told Me:*" a degenerative process (much like calcification) that makes people over into heroes. Through this process, our educational media turn flesh-and-blood individuals into pious, perfect creatures without conflicts, pain, credibility, or human interest" (19). From there, the goal is to put some of these new ideas to use in a discussion about Christopher Columbus.

One way to approach the transition would be for the instructor to say, "Let's use Christopher Columbus as an example. What do you know about him?" Typical responses might include a student's singsong rendition of the poem "In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue" or a confident assertion that "Columbus discovered America." A less typical response might be a precocious student's indictment that Columbus was responsible for the deaths of millions of "Indians" and that he started the first trans-Atlantic slave route. In the case of the first response, other students might smile, nod in recognition, or roll their eyes, but in the case of the second, the instructor might witness confused looks and dropped jaws. Students might wonder, "Is that true? How many Indians? What is he/she talking about?"

Of course, the instructor could step up and be the "sage on the stage" – the voice of authority. He or she could answer all of their questions and demystify Columbus, enumerating the ways in which his voyages to America robbed the natives of their resources, their culture, their dignity,

and their lives. That approach, however, also robs students of the opportunity to discover, in the now-available voices of those who traveled with Columbus, the horrors that were inflicted upon the natives. Once the instructor has "told all," the students are also robbed of the opportunity to contribute important details to the conversation in their own words and voices. What's more, students who have internalized the message from "The History Teacher" might look skeptically upon the instructor's narrative.

Having been through the "let me tell you all about it" version of the exercise once, I decided to try something different. After "The History Teacher" and exposure to "heroification," I handed the students a questionnaire and a stapled-shut copy of Bill Bigelow's "Columbus in the Classroom," which serves as the afterward of Hans Koning's Columbus: His Enterprise.[5] The chapter is a reader-friendly introduction to the idea that American textbooks and curricula for a very long time avoided the controversies around Columbus and made him a hero. Bigelow incorporates just enough of the graphic passages from Koning's book into his chapter to give students a real sense of the destruction of the native people and the mixed reactions that even Columbus's crew and companions had to the pillage.

I instructed the students to go out and interview five people of any age about Christopher Columbus and to record their responses to some basic questions. After they recorded the responses, they were to open and read the stapled-shut assignment. Then they were to write a journal entry that analyzed the results of the survey in light of the reading they had just finished, with the knowledge that journals would be due at the beginning of the next class period and that we would be discussing their reactions during class.

When students came to class the next period, those who did not know the darker side of the Columbus story were very vocal. They expressed

[5] See Koning's book for a summary of firsthand accounts on Columbus's exploits. Even more powerful – but too long to assign for some classes – are the primary source *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies by Bartolome de las Casas* (Penguin, 1992) and a stunning treatment of Las Casas's account by liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez called *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Orbis, 1993).

shock and grief at what they had read. They also made a connection to "The History Teacher" — that they had never been taught these parts of the story - and they were mad. They cited numbers and details from the reading that empowered them to speak with authority about Columbus, rather than just spout off memorized rhymes or phrases. The timing of the activity allowed students to discover on their own the concept of "more than one side to every story," and it allowed them to learn and reflect at their own paces. Armed with information, confidence, and emotions, they really had something to say in class. Students who were already familiar with both sides of the story came with more facts, but they also came with the surprise realization that some of the people they interviewed didn't know what they knew about Columbus. That discovery allowed the familiar students the chance to reflect on discrepancies in the versions of history that students are exposed to — a valuable lesson on its own. The survey gave students a chance to engage in conversation with others about Columbus. The stapled-shut reading created a sense of anticipation. (Again, the forbidden fruit captures attention: Why is it stapled shut?) And the required journal entry forced total participation in the exercise so that I could gain a sense of what each student had discovered. The result was a rich class discussion marked by greater participation and a more even playing field for students. (Those who may not have known about Columbus did not have to sit back and wonder how or why the others did already know. Those who did know got to experience the joy of discovery that their peers had reached.) In addition, students had already begun to formulate their thoughts in their journals, so they were more comfortable and articulate when they offered their insights.

To be sure, lessons that allow students to discover information and to make and articulate connections take a good deal of set-up time. The pieces have to be in place, timed properly, for the students to experience an Aha! moment. The resulting activity, however, can be like an " adaptive conducting simulator": it can produce opportunities for students starting from a range of experiences, ages, and abilities to engage in intellectual conversation that can benefit everyone involved.

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Telling the Story in the Humanities

Bonnie Tilson

"All of life comes to us in narrative form; it's a story we tell."

The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life by Zander and Zander (9)

This past April, I sat in the audience at a theater production of *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century,* an avant-garde play whose main characters included the late Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols. The play described the origins of punk rock and how punk affects society, steering the audience into seeing both from a new perspective. You might ask, "Why would a woman who was too old to care about — or even know about — Sid Vicious or punk rock choose to be in this audience?" Because it was performed by one of my favorite theater companies, and I had faith in the company's ability to tell a compelling story. I trust their ability to tell stories well worth hearing and their ability to tell stories in amazingly creative ways, both socially and intellectually. The production so engaged me that I took out a pen in the middle of the performance and found just enough white space on the back of the playbill to jot down some notes for this paper. Thus began the telling of another story — a narrative about how to set the stage for students so that they learn to fully appreciate who tells the stories we hear in academia (and even those we don't always hear) and how students can learn to tell their own stories in a way that demonstrates that they have mastered the material at hand and have applied critical thinking to the subject.

In this paper, I focus on the basic building blocks of translating the Humanities into a compelling narrative: choosing a textbook that includes diversity, injecting creativity into classroom assignments, and guiding students through the maze of narrating what they have learned in the classroom and applying it to their daily lives.

The power of our storytelling is enhanced by the selection of a textbook sensitive to diverse perspectives, because which stories are told and how

they are told are both crucial for enlarging our awareness and understanding of other voices. In our global world we can no longer focus only on the Western perspective. When I began teaching in community colleges in the mid-1990s, there was a paucity of textbooks available that acknowledged that we are dominated by ideas from European and American writers, virtually all of whom are male. Most philosophy texts simply addressed the traditional Western perspective that all philosophy began in Greece in 600 BCE and made clear that the European-American male perspective was the only perspective worth teaching unless you were specifically teaching a class titled Eastern Philosophy, African Philosophy or Women's Studies. I had to search for textbooks that included readings from Asian, African and feminist writers. Fortunately, the task of searching for such texts is less difficult today, but it is crucial to do so if we want to broaden students' awareness of other voices in our history.

What do we give our students in humanities classes when we ask them to look at the world from many different perspectives? By having them read original writings from the great thinkers of the world along with other perspectives, we offer them the opportunity to develop an appreciation of social interdependence, and stimulate social discourse that leads them closer to embracing the necessity for fundamental human rights — equal treatment and equal voices within society for all people.

The language of the humanities is broad, the content more so. It's impossible to exaggerate the importance of content. For example, students should come away from a philosophy course understanding that despite his fame, Socrates never actually wrote anything and that, despite her lack of fame, Mary Wollstonecraft cleverly pleaded for the education of women in the 1700s by arguing that failing to educate women harmed men as well. Still, humanities courses are not content-driven in the same way as math and science courses.

Math and science classes are linear — they lead us to understand their principles in specific ways by beginning at point A and proceeding to point Z in order. Humanities classes, however, are not linear. Students can take most of them in any order. However, the content of humanities

courses must illuminate how the facts help us understand and make sense of our world today and how the facts relate to other cultures and peoples of our world. To this end, we must do our best to introduce as many different cultures and intellectual perspectives into our curriculum as possible. In designing Philosophical Issues, which introduces the main branches of philosophy — epistemology, metaphysics, political philosophy, ethics and aesthetics — I use a multicultural text, *Philosophy and Choice* by Kit Christensen, so that students can read diverse perspectives on philosophy and original writings by the philosophers themselves. Consequently, students are introduced not only to the great ideas of Western philosophers such as Socrates, Descartes, Kant, Russell and Chomsky, but also to African philosopher Serequeberhan discussing contemporary approaches to recreating African philosophy and Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan's position that Western philosophy needs to acknowledge and embrace the value of Eastern philosophy if it intends to support the value of philosophical inquiry. This text also includes articles by feminist writers and writers, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and B.F. Skinner, who are not traditionally considered philosophers. When students read the stories of African, Indian, Latin-American, and other thinkers, they learn that we all have stories to tell if we would only listen to each other. They also get the opportunity to see that categorizing people as philosophers is not restricted to the traditional Western model.

When designing classes that have a cultural focus that does not lend itself to multicultural readings, we can diversify ideas in other ways. For example, when I teach American Women's Studies, I use a text that offers a broad mosaic of perspectives from American women writers. I use Shaw and Lee's *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions* precisely because it has readings from women in white, black, Latina, and Native American cultures, and the readings are relevant to straight women, gay women and transgendered women. The more doors we open to students, the more they learn and the more they can flourish in an increasingly more diverse society.

The second building block in setting the stage for humanities classes is to design assignments and classroom activities that require students to

think about ideas in new ways. One assignment I use is to ask students to interview people about their ideas on a particular issue. Prodding students to engage in scholarly discussions outside the classroom strengthens their ability to listen to others and share their own ideas. Students in Technology and Society class are asked to interview people about their definitions of progress. Students are asked to create three or four questions for their interviews and then to write a short paper about what they learn from them. In class, we discuss whether or not we can say that a society is progressive simply because it is technologically sophisticated, or whether the society must also use the technology ethically in order to be considered progressive. Students often protest that the sample is too small to draw conclusions, and it certainly is too small to reach any statistically valid conclusions. However, they learn that we can understand ideas from talking with different people even when we cannot create valid statistical evidence.

Another idea to direct students to gain greater awareness of the world in which they live is to ask them to make journal entries on certain subjects and write a paper about their observations. Students in Women's Studies are asked to document their experiences of gender bias over the course of two weeks and then write a paper about what they learn from their observations. Again, statistical evidence is not the goal-understanding how stories are told and how we see the world is the goal. In Ethics class last semester, I asked students to read articles in the newspaper or on the Internet, watch TV news, or discuss issues with friends about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. They were required to create a list of the ethical questions they saw created by the Katrina disaster. They were then asked to write a paper about what they learned from this process. In all of these assignments, students are required to apply critical thinking to the writing of the final paper — they must think critically about the process of hearing other people's stories and what those stories tell us about how people experience their world. At the end of the Katrina assignment, students created 41 ethical questions. They asked such questions as: Were people sent to repair the levees morally responsible when they stopped to help people along the way instead of moving quickly to do the repairs that would help larger numbers of people? How much did the finger pointing or blame-game interfere with the more important

task of caring for people in harm's way? Are we morally lacking when we engage in the former at the expense of the latter? Should we be ethically mandated to deal with the causes of global warming, since these oceanic conditions make hurricanes more common? How do we determine who should be rescued first? Is it morally responsible to create a priority list — can we value one life over another for any reason?

Broadening student perspectives — teaching them to listen to stories- can also be achieved by bringing various artworks and cultural artifacts into the classroom. In my philosophical issues class, I introduce each of the basic branches of philosophy by bringing different creative works into the classroom. To introduce epistemology, students listen to a short essay by Fabio Morabito about rags that declares "rags generalize" (to a rag a priceless vase is no different from a dime-store ashtray), "rags are in love with origins" (after all, rags come from grandma's flannel PJs or grandpa's old t-shirts) and "without the concept of edge rags wouldn't exist" (91-95). Morabito's essay asks students to look at the world in ways that few of us have ever considered, but rags can be seen in this way if we are willing to entertain new ideas. I introduce metaphysics by showing a *Twilight Zone* episode in which people stranded in a diner are trying to figure out which of them is a Martian in disguise. Students in Women's Studies watch excerpts from Ken Burns' documentary *Not For Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* not only to learn about the origins of the women's movement in the United States, but also to learn about the art of documentation. We discuss how documentaries tell stories.

Students in my Technology and Society class participate in classroom activities designed to help them visualize different perspectives on technology. For example, they look at flip books and stereopticons to experience how some of the earliest images of our world were created. Technology and Society students also watch the first 20 minutes of Chaplin's film *Modern Times* and then discuss which images of technology portrayed in the film reflect ideas we still hold today. This film introduces students to the art of silent film as well as changes in technology so that we can discuss how the stories about our world change as technology changes. Indeed, Chaplin's images of working on

an assembly line inspired the famous sequence in which Lucy works on the assembly line in the chocolate factory stuffing bonbons in her cheeks and down her uniform when the line is sped up.

The third building block in orchestrating how we tell stories in humanities classes is to teach students to tell their own stories in a way that demonstrates that they have learned the course material and are capable of applying it to their own worldview. In humanities classes, we have to opportunity to engage students in rich discussions about how they see their world, but we must recognize that some students see it only in black and white — or small and flat.

Many of our students come to us with the same impression of life that Zander and Zander describe in a story they tell about a man who sees Picasso on a train. The man recognizes Picasso and asks him "why he did not paint people 'the way they really are.' Picasso asked what he meant by that expression. The man opened his wallet and took out a snapshot of his wife, saying, 'That's my wife.' Picasso responded, 'Isn't she rather small and flat?'" (11). Our task is to help students understand that there are many different images of the world — told both through stories and visual imagery — and to do so we must help them develop the ability to hear all sides of the story before they make assumptions that our world is only small and flat.

I begin each semester with a list of Rules for Class Discussion, which help to foster the proper atmosphere for sharing and demonstrating learning. We go over these rules the first day of class and revisit them throughout the semester. The rules help to create a safe environment in which students can express ideas without being afraid that they will be ridiculed. The rules instruct students to allow their ideas to settle long enough on their tongues before they are uttered to insure that they are reasonable. Certainly, sharing stories in humanities class discussions does not mean that students should say anything they want or tell deeply personal stories looking to their classmates or instructor for therapy. We can help to avoid this by clearly explaining our expectations that oral participation in the class means that students demonstrate that their own ideas are enriched by ideas they have gleaned from their textbooks or class discussions.

By following the class rules and yet still being able to tell their own stories as they relate to the topic at hand, community college students are learning skills that will serve them well during college and job interviews, as well as for the rest of their lives, where they must articulate ideas clearly and precisely. However, the most important thing they learn is that they can become subjects in their own history rather than objects of history — they learn to voice their ideas. We can encourage students to tell their own stories effectively by asking them to explain why they think the way they do and remind them that just because their parents or their traditions said so is not ample justification for accepting an idea. We can also ask them to write journal entries in which they respond to questions we ask, requiring them to incorporate textual references showing how they apply course material to life experiences. Perhaps one of my students' favorite assignments is the dialogue assignment. Students are required to use two readings as a resource to create a dialogue between two philosophers. The object of the assignment is to allow students to be creative as they demonstrate their knowledge of the material. One student had feminist Nancy Tuana in the trenches during a battle, talking with Plato. Another student created a dating game scenario in which a young woman was interviewing Socrates, Gandhi and Buddha to decide which one she would rather go out with. Of course, her questions had to be philosophical in nature.

Teaching humanities classes offers us the opportunity to lay foundations and erect scaffolding that can be the building blocks for students as they create the narratives of their own lives. We serve our students well when we bring all the tools necessary for a solid foundation — a foundation that enables them to listen carefully to others and tell their own stories in a creative and dynamic way. Setting the stage by choosing the most relevant texts, spicing up classes with artwork and creative assignments and incorporating classroom discussion rules may be time-consuming, but it gives our students the gift of being able to orchestrate their own new world in which social justice and mutual respect are more likely to be realized.

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Close Description: A Technique for Teaching and Learning

Elizabeth Penton

"Their minds are filled with big ideas, images, and distorted facts..." Bob Dylan

He threw, and caught Aineias in the hip, in the place where the hip-bone turns inside the thigh, the place men call the cup-socket. It smashed the cup-socket and broke the tendons on both sides of it, and the rugged stone tore the skin backward, so that the fighter dropping to one knee stayed leaning on the ground with his heavy hand, and a covering of black night came over both eyes.

Now in this place Aineias lord of men might have perished had not Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter, been quick to perceive him, his mother, who had borne him to Anchises the ox-herd; and about her beloved son came streaming her white arms, and with her white robe thrown in a fold in front she shielded him, this keeping off the thrown weapons lest some fast-mounted Danaan strike the bronze spear through his chest and strip the life from him.

Lines 305-317 Book 5 The Iliad,
translation by Richmond Lattimore

"Describe one specific aspect of this art piece to us as if we are blind!" I find myself asking this of online art history students as I push them to expand their powers of descriptive writing, the backbone of both teaching and learning not just in online humanities classes but in many college venues and discipline areas. Close descriptions and thorough details provide the real fiber of both good writing and good reading experiences at all levels of higher education. I suggest that close description can be a powerful building block for learning of all sorts, especially in the early years of a liberal arts education.

Close descriptions are the product of paying keen attention to detail and small things and then articulating them well. Writing close descriptions build on each other, with reference back and forth to larger themes, motifs, and interpretations. Maybe it is my training as an archaeologist that gives me the perspective that these small things often constitute the crucial facts, the data upon which bigger ideas (like theories) hinge. Whatever we do with facts, either clarify or distort the greater webs of meaning that they weave, the facts provide objectivity. They are the bedrock of knowledge. The practice of close description teaches students to involve themselves with the particular and to infuse their writing and thinking with the vitality of detail.

The major work involved in close description is observation. It is an active engagement. For instance, in art history, a student may be asked to describe Rodin's famous sculpture The Thinker. Students know that Rodin's work exhibits naturalism. They know to say the word because the teacher told them to. But do they know what it means? Do they even know what they are saying? Consider the impact of a close description. The student is asked to describe the right shoulder blade of *The Thinker.* The student looks. The student begins to identify specific parts of the shoulder blade and gives words to what she sees. Some of the words are elementary. Most of the observations arise from everyday, real-life experiences. This sort of description would have to do with bulges and contours, with light and shade, and perhaps the quality of bronze as a substance. Attention is paid to how the parts articulate: "The skin of the upper back is stretching as the arm movement pushes the upper part of the shoulder blade away from the spine. Muscles are pressed upward under the skin from the slight pressure of the arching bone." Vocabulary is employed. Naturalism is identified. Sentences are constructed. The student is really looking, carefully. If she is asked to do this in writing, then the reader becomes interested because of the precision of language and the shared experience it reflects, and is, thus, engaged. As with poetry, the seemingly small detail has made itself essential to understanding the whole. The student becomes able to both identify and to value the particular.

"A powerful agent is the correct word." Mark Twain

Close description is important in writing as well as learning of all kinds. Educators commonly require students to include examples in their writing. Often, what is meant by examples, often, is actually the need for detail. Perhaps a student writes, "The weather was changing." and the instructor asks, "How was the weather changing? Give me examples, and please be specific". This sort of query should force the student to perk up, to observe, and to begin to discern. The student must ask comparative questions, must think about what came before, what signs are now present, what evidence of atmospheric fluctuations are apparent, what does it look like, feel like, what is immanent upon the landscape now? And, what aspect of this is significant? Within these details emerge inevitable bits of energy for new information and new ideas. It is not enough to say that the dog was black or that the grass was green: "The limping, snarling, gravid bitch disappeared over the dune as the wind began to lift sand into the air". "The new spring green of tender shoots of grass filtering sunlight shone in the late afternoon. It was Easter Sunday". These sorts of close descriptions provide a lead that takes the reader with them. Furthermore, we respond to the particular. What will happen next? What does it mean? Is this consistent with other facts that we have? Students find it easy to focus on and to master close description, once they are asked to do so.

Highlighting the specific makes for effective communication. As a good writer, one must be certain about details (such as the exact way that *The Thinker's* shoulder blade is posed). Close descriptions must be accurate. Economy and brevity provide other strong points for close description. There is no room for inflated or generalized statements but there is all the room in the world for precision. Close description involves the proper command of vocabulary. Likewise, there is no guesswork for the reader, only delight and even joy in the clear comprehension of the particular.

"Sorry for the length of this correspondence. I would have written a shorter letter but I did not have the time." Mark Twain

I ask students to write close descriptions in a number of assignments across content areas. These assignments can require only a few sentences or up to a few pages. This enables me to grade quickly and helps the students not be intimidated by the work. However, the focus required is

intense. Such assignments reflect "real world" writing and oral communication requirements — high content within limited space and time. Students learn to observe, practice basic communication skills, apply vocabulary, and grasp concepts. Teachers can ask a student to closely describe something to another student or to someone in their life. Example: Describe in detail what happened when you added this chemical to that chemical. Many of our 'action words' in assignments demand the basic grasp of detail. Train your students to practice close descriptions, by modeling for them both verbally and in written form. Make close descriptions the basis for test questions, for assignments, for short essays, or for discussion boards.

Another application of the concept of close description is in assigning papers on very narrow topics. Students can write short, sophisticated papers on small topics. These parameters enforce depth, which, in combination with fact and detail, evidence the coveted goal of contemporary educators everywhere — critical thinking.

Following are specific examples of employing this technique in different subject areas. Many of these are either Discussion Board questions, selected questions from final exams or assignments for short essays. It should be said that students are able to respond to these questions because they have had practice in smaller, prior course assignments dealing with the material.

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Art History

- Closely describe just the horse heads in Horsemen, the detail of the Procession from the Parthenon (fig. 5-45). How does their physical form reflect Classical Greek heroism?
- From your study of Minoan art, do you think that the artists are capturing a moment, like a photograph, in their representations? Pick one Minoan image to describe in detail and explain what you think this moment means, and why the artist and culture may have seen it as significant. Use the term 'curvilinear' in your response.
- Explain in one sentence, using appropriate vocabulary, why and how Gothic architecture is technically outstanding (how does it stand up and what is amazing about it?). Use new vocabulary, do not use any

of the terms that people posting before you use.

- The Greeks and Romans used tesserae (mosaic) on the floor. There is a nice saying in Art History to the effect that later on, the artists "pulled the carpet up and put it on the walls...". Pick one early Christian or Byzantine mosaic to succinctly describe and tell us what kind of additional iconographic meaning comes from the effect(s) of the work being placed where it is (on the walls or ceiling).

Introduction to Film

- Describe the director's use of line and movement in the climactic shot in which Ethan encounters Scar in Scar's teepee. (*The Searchers*)
- Identify the dominant in 3 instances. How is the dominant created cinematographically? How does the dominant and dominance as an attitude work in the film? Is it ever turned around? (*Schindler's List*)
- Pick one scene or shot that is a solid example of formalism. Pick one scene or shot that is a solid example of realism. Discuss these shots with reference to the film as a whole. (*Bridge on the River Kwai*)
- Aerial shots are important in creating a particular tone and atmosphere in this film. Analyze at least two scenes with aerial shots and describe how the technique instilled an otherwise elusive tone in the film. Develop a thesis of some sort about the function of the aerial shots. (*The English Patient*)

General Anthropology and Cultural Anthropology

- Describe the Visual Predation Theory of Primate Evolution in one paragraph.
- How do the archaeologists know that the silk threads from the Siberian Ice Maiden's clothing came from wild silk worms as opposed to domesticated silk worms? What information did this reveal about Scythian trade?
- Closely analyze 'play' as a primate behavior that refines social skills.
- Carefully describe proxemic patterns in American culture in comparison with proxemic patterns in Arab cultures.
- Name and define three hard science methods used in the archaeological study of Oetzi the Ice Man. What do they reveal about his life?

"Get your facts first, then you can distort them as much as you please." Mark Twain

Details may be small but large cases can be made or broken on the basis of the particular. Similarly, memory is built and retrieved on concrete images and experiences. During most of human history (ironically, much of it before writing was even dreamt of), storytelling was the defining mnemonic device, storing and tapping into the joys and sorrows, the meanderings and attention-grabbing events of particular human experiences. Around the world, oral traditions boasting incredibly long and involved sagas are built on only two mechanisms — grammatical pattern and descriptive detail. Concepts of time and history are not consistent in all cultures, but what they share is attention to detail. In a sense, the practice of close description is the opposite of reductionism. It opens up human experience and allows for participation.

When primal Dawn spread on the eastern sky
Her fingers of pink light, Odysseus' true son
Stood up, drew on his tunic and his mantle,
slung on a sword-belt and a new-edged sword,
tied his smooth feet into good raw-hide sandals,
and left his room, a god's brilliance upon him.
Lines 1-6, Book 2, The Odyssey.
Translation by Robert Fitzgerald

"Ohnainewk delighted in hierarchic expressions...
and could say 'bear' in such a way that we were awed
as if in the presence of ursine power".
From an ethnographic study of the Inuit
by Edmund Carpenter.

Making close descriptions enhances the life of the mind. As students become comfortable with this skill, not only do they develop mental acumen, they also feel more confident in making connections between details. They quickly move to picking out other details to investigate. They want to know how details relate to larger ideas, to themes, and to

theories. They begin to formulate questions, with a sound basis, they look for exceptions to rules and they test out these ideas. They understand that some thoughts lead down a dead-end and that others open up new worlds. A reverberation moves back and forth between close descriptions of details and recognition of patterns within related or contrasting details. Through this sort of learning, the particular detail comes to hold within itself many clues about overall meaning, leading to big questions, to unlikely comparisons and to discovery. But it is one step at a time, on solid ground, and by attention to the particular that students come to find that they are educating themselves.

Close description is not mysterious — but it is powerful — it hones language skills. Because of the simplicity of the concept, with practice, students easily gain confidence in their ability to write, to speak, and to see. They learn to pay attention, to be discerning, and to make connections with precision and economy. Teaching with close descriptions can be done in any venue. Learning the value of detail helps our students to be informed critics of media and lifelong devotees of the arts and sciences. They learn to trust themselves and their own perceptions and thus tap into the experience of what Linda Flowers, author, educator and member of the North Carolina Humanities Council, calls our shared "humanistic apprehension":

> The [Inuit] carving lives in the hand as it is moved, spoken to and about. Charm toggle, ornament, moves on the clothing of the wearer. Some, especially those of the Dorset Culture dating from as early as 800 B.C., are so detailed, so accurate, we can identify [the] species, even [the] sub-species: a Red-throated Loon from a Common Loon. Yet one ptarmigan carving is scarcely larger than the head of a match; an ivory bear — running, with claws — less than 3/8ths of an inch high; a carving of a Glaucose Gull weighs less than 1/60th of an ounce. I photographically magnified, 1000 – 1200 times, a number of these pieces. All shared a quality of sizelessness: each, when blown up to monumental size, suffered no qualitative change of effect, for the artists had reduced each form to its basic essentials. All were produced, of course, without the aid of lens or steel. Though incredibly minute, they lack the charming fragility of miniatures, and give instead the impression of mature power. Each seems independent, self-contained.

> [Inuit] tales share this quality. Generally, the narrator speaks only of things you can touch and see. He constantly chooses the concrete word, in phrase after phrase, forcing you to touch and see. No speaker so insistently teaches the general through the particular: he has mastery over the definite, detailed, particular image.
>
> Ohnainewk usually began with a crisis, so to speak, and wove backwards and forwards in time, with many omissions and repetitions, his accounts so full of digressions the plots starved while he pursued each passing irrelevant fancy. He once told me how he had seen a white bear and a red bear, and chose to pursue the former, which, of course, turned out to be the wrong choice, but we never heard why the other bear was red. (Carpenter 8-9)

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Guiding our Students in Learning a Real World Mentality

Keri O'Malley

Ask graduates what they wished they had learned at college before they entered the "real world" and you might be surprised. The majority of answers would not focus on academics but rather on what we identify as a "real world mentality."

We are entering a time of focusing on soft skills to balance out book skills. Community colleges are asked to better prepare students in terms of workplace attitudes with little information on how or even what to bring into our classrooms to meet this goal. In the rush of teaching, planning, and meeting with students, we think that we do not have time to include more material in our lesson plans. However, incorporating a real world mentality is easier than we think.

Whereas skills are abilities that we complete, a real world mentality is an attitude. It illustrates to students not only how to interact effectively in the workplace but also how to succeed. Our mentality is a habitual way of thinking. We carry it with us and present it to others. It is taught and learned.

A "real world mentality" is a crucial component of our students' future success. As staff and faculty, we can guide them in understanding this mentality by tailoring our encounters with our students. With this understanding, our focus turns to how to include this success attitude in any course or on-campus activity. To answer this question, it is important to revisit new ideas on how to include this into our courses and activities. The following list includes fifteen integrative ideas on incorporating a real world mentality. These concepts may be implemented collectively or individually and used at any time.

1. *Current behavior determines future options*
 Ask students to list what qualities employers look for from the individuals that they hire. Discuss this as a class and create a list

of qualities that everyone (including you) agrees on. Then, ask your students to rate themselves in each of these vital areas on a scale of 1-10. (Student Success)

2. *Goal setting and buy-in*
 Students need to set goals and find a value in their classes. On the first day of class, have your students what they want to learn in your course as well as the grade they expect to earn. Collect it and review it so that you can better understand their needs. This goal statement sets the standard that you will hold them accountable to and is what students will strive for during the semester. Compile and distribute collective responses. Hold a discussion that helps students better understand the shared answers. This shared commitment allows students to buy into their own achievements. (Student Success)

3. *Asking for help and feedback*
 Asking for assistance and feedback is not a weakness, but rather an opportunity for growth. Design assignments where students need to ask for additional information in order to complete the project. Encourage these inquiries with positive feedback. In addition, motivate students to ask for feedback on their projects. Show them that this process will help them to improve future assignments.

4. *Future plans and realism*
 Have students detail both their short-term and long-term goals including where they would like to be in five, ten and twenty years. Afterwards, ask if their current behavior is in agreement with these goals. If so, ask your students to explain how. If not, ask your students to submit a proposal detailing what they need to do to change their weaknesses into strengths and reach their goals. (Student Success)

5. *Professionalism is an attitude*
 Professionalism is relating to those around you and treating everyone with consideration and respect. It is our character. We learn how to be professional by observing those around us. Show your

students that professionalism is important and requires courtesy and respect. Ask that students follow-up with you about projects. In addition, students should be aware of both their language and actions. If students act out, meet with them privately to talk about their behavior.

6. *Show students the connection between success as a student and success as an effective career person (Student Success)*
About halfway through the term, incorporate a lesson where your classroom is similar to a workplace during performance evaluation time. Have students write their own evaluation being objective as to their strengths and weaknesses. Include an accurate assessment sheet, which focuses both on skills and attitudes. Have students detail a plan as to how they will improve on both their strengths and weaknesses. Meet with students individually a few weeks later to follow-up on their progress.

7. *Actions have consequences*
Students are responsible for their academic success or failure. Help students understand that their actions have consequences. Set strict standards for attendance and policies for work that is turned in late. Keep these standards throughout the semester. If a student misses a class, wait for them to approach you about missed work.

8. *Valuing diversity is vital*
Help your students understand the value in working with different types of people. They will not get to choose their co-workers, yet they will get evaluated on how well they work with them. Team work is critical and can be used in every course through collaborative exercises. Emphasize to your students the importance of diversity training and finding common ground. Divide your class into discussion or activity groups. Try to rotate these groups every two weeks so that by semester's end they will have had the opportunity to work with everyone in your class and expand their interpersonal communication skills. At the end of the term, host a discussion asking students what they have learned. (Student Success)

9. *Learning to think in front of others and overcoming a fear of public speaking (Student Success)*
 Our students need to learn to think on their feet and be able to better express themselves. All classes can incorporate some form of public speaking. Give an oral exam or ask students to research and discuss a particular topic. By giving a different concept to each student, a range of material can be reviewed by your entire class. An additional activity involves having students take opposing views on a topic. These activities encourage critical thinking as well as helps students learn to think on their feet.

10. *Personal initiative and accountability*
 Ingenuity and reliability are keys to success, but not all students have the same innate level of initiative and responsibility. Require students to ask questions about reading materials and lectures. By doing this, your students learn accountability and initiative. (Student Success)

11. *Perception becomes reality*
 How others perceive us becomes their reality of us. Help students understand that their personal appearance, attitude, and how they treat others speaks more to future employers than what they say verbally. Observe how students interact with their peers and superiors as well as how they carry themselves. Provide feedback when necessary.

12. *Students are more objective about their own work after they have had the opportunity to evaluate others' work*
 Peer reviews help all students involved. Help your students conduct a peer review of an oral or written assignment. The class period before your students review each other's work, guide a discussion on the criteria that should be used, and use a sample paper as part of an editing exercise. Based on this collaborative effort, create a worksheet to use with each review. It's important to recognize student strengths as well as indicate what can be improved on. (Student Success)

13. *Discover connections with the real world. Keep current and apply learned skills (Student Success)*
 Help students make connections between their classroom work and the real world. Students respond when they see relevance in what you are teaching and can relate a topic to a current situation. Students relate through proximity (how close something is to us), timeliness (how quickly we will need the information), and importance (the significance we attach). Have your students research topics and then describe their connection to class areas. In addition, incorporate current events in your lessons.

14. *Comfort and ability with technology*
 Technology is here to stay. Encourage your students to advance their technological skills and etiquette. Provide a library tour that shows students the online and database resources available to them. Require these sources for research projects. In addition, have students email you questions and assignment using proper email etiquette. Finally, utilize our available blackboard shells even if you do not teach online or in a hybrid setting. Blackboard can store course information and assignments as well as serve as a discussion forum.

15. *Vision: seeing your capability in order to make the most of your opportunities (Student Success)*
 Motivate beyond your time with students. At the end of each semester, ask your students to describe what they have learned. You may also want to ask them what advice they would give to future students who take your class. Open a discussion on how they will use their current skills in future classes and in the workplace.

In the traditional focus on skill-set instruction, teaching a real world mentality is often overlooked, but is essential to student success. In the present economy and job market, employees will face streamlining. It is fundamental that we help our students equip themselves with a real world mentality that will enable them to reinvent themselves and stay competitive.

Not all learning is academic. Students who are able to make connections between our classrooms and professional settings are better prepared for success when they enter or return to the workforce. As educators, our goal is to provide the tools to assist our students in creating a vision for success and reaching their potential. A real world mentality will offer students, staff, and faculty the opportunity to grow, develop, and have an advantage over their peers.

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Promotion of In-group Identification and the Mastery of Critical Thinking in the Learning College Classroom

Peter Wooldridge
Mary Anne Grabarek

This paper focuses on a humanities course entitled The Nature of America, in which two faculty collaborators have examined the development of a learning "partnership" designed so that all aspects of the class lead to substantive learning for all participants (students and faculty) and clearly defined learning outcomes that are shared by the entire class, including the teachers. This approach reflects Durham Technical Community College's mission to become a Learning College where everyone is described as a learner to "focus on their active participation as full partners in the learning process" (Krakauer, 2005). The basis of our "partnership" lies in the strengthening of a sense of group identity for individual students enrolled in the course.

Brown (2006) defines a group as "an interdependent collection of individuals who interact and possess a shared identity." Taylor, Peplau and Sears (2006), however, recognize that groups differ on level of interaction and identification with other members and, using these criteria, identify six different types of groups. As defined by the authors, the social group made up of students enrolled in a course appears to be either an "audience" or a "crowd." They may, of course, become a "team" if the instructor builds in shared tasks that force interaction, but, except for that circumstance, students could spend an entire semester as "a face in the crowd" to both the instructor and other "crowd" members. Interestingly, students in a classroom are not listed as an example by the authors, nor are they used as an example in a brief discussion of the development of "virtual" groups on the Internet (Taylor, et. al., 2006)).

There is substantial psychological research to suggest that certain group characteristics can make group functioning more successful. For example, groups that are cohesive often show higher verbal interaction, group

member satisfaction, and increased productivity (Shaw, 1976). Research also suggests that information from a reference group (group which the individual uses to determine attitudes and behavior) is processed in a more focused and coherent manner (Taylor, et. al., 2006)

The effect of reference group identification is strengthened if the reference group becomes an "in-group," which may be defined as any group with which the individual identifies as opposed to groups with which he or she does not identify (Taylor, et. al., 2006). Available research suggests that in-group categorization can happen in the absence of little or no immediate interaction with other group members. In other words, the mere act of sitting in a classroom together might motivate the creation of an in-group (Myers, 2006).

Research on the in-group phenomenon has centered mostly on its role in prejudice and discrimination. As such, the results are primarily negative, i.e., in-group status increases the possibility of the use of stereotypes, aggression against the out-group, and an increased risk of ethnocentrism by members of the in-group. As outlined by Taylor, et. al. (2006), four specific attributes of an in-group can usually be observed:

- In-group favoritism, which provides for more favorable evaluations of what other in-group members do or say;
- A group-serving bias, which leads to more internal attributions of success and external attributions of failure for fellow in-group members;
- An increased belief in similarity between group members; and
- A perception of other members as more complex, persuasive and multidimensional.

Although usually viewed as working against critical thinking, these attributes of an in-group might help to facilitate the development of social support among students, to increase focused cognitive processing of material, and to decrease prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination as

the new in-group begins to supersede pre-existing in-groups. In essence, facilitating an in-group in the classroom can help to create an atmosphere that encourages students to develop their "voice" without fear of ridicule or criticism from other class members. Indeed, Social Identity theory argues that an individual's self-concept is based partially on one's in-group identification, and, further, that when an in-group is perceived as superior in some way, its members will experience increased self-esteem (Myers, 2006).

Promoting in-group identification supports the development of a classroom environment that has been shown to lead to highly effective learning. Derek Bok, former president of Harvard and noted author, recognizes that cognitive research on effective classroom learning shows it to be dependent on active critical analysis of varied problem sets with an emphasis on frequent feedback from the instructor, small group interactions, and frequent testing that requires the use of critical thought (Bok, 2005). However, in an article in the Boston Globe, Bok notes that "one investigator has found that fewer than 10 percent of college professors pay any attention to such work when they prepare for their classes" (2005). Focus on the development of a student in-group by faculty can facilitate the type of course preparation that leads to the classroom Bok is referencing. Traditional lecture courses, on the other hand, do not lend themselves to the learner-learner relationships upon which in-group identity is built (Barnett, 1999).

In this paper, we report the results of an examination of student class participation, performance levels in achievement of learning goals, and persistence as they relate to the development of a learning partnership with students in two separate semesters. It is the belief of the faculty collaborators that this "partnership building" fostered the development of in-group status for class members, which facilitated a truly transformational educational process, and, in essence, encouraged and supported the classroom characteristics discussed by Bok (2005). This article helps to illustrate our journey (so far) on the road to creating a learning environment that allows for and encourages the "voices" of all class participants.

PERSISTENCE

As an Achieving the Dream college, Durham Tech is trying to increase positive learning outcomes for all students, including students who are at a low-income level and/or students of color. For this study, we did not have information on income level of students, but through database information we did know the ethnicity of our student population. We both identify as Caucasian.

Data is available for the 2005 and 2006 Spring semesters. For the 2005 semester, thirty-three students were enrolled and present in the class on the first day. Of these, six dropped the class before the end of the withdrawal period (60% of the class days). A high percentage of students who dropped the class were students of color. In addition, 77% of the students who "disappeared" from the class without dropping or continuing to attend were students of color. Seven students of color remained in the class.

For the Spring 2006 semester, thirty-three students were enrolled and present in the class on the first day. Of these, two dropped the class before the end of the withdrawal period (60% of the class days). One student was Caucasian and one student was from India. In addition, two students "disappeared" from the class without dropping or continuing to attend. Both were students of color. Nineteen students of color remained in the class. Three of these students did not complete the final project or exam.

PARTICIPATION

The Nature of America class does not have a core body of knowledge for the discipline in the same way that history, psychology, or sociology do. There is no "canon" that constitutes an agreed upon group of documents that contain the wisdom of the discipline. There are several reasons for this situation: 1) The field of cultural studies is relatively new, 2) The material written in cultural studies is of varying quality and often biased, and 3) Learning in cultural studies requires an up-to-the-minute quality that suggests the juxtaposition of a scholarly article and a newspaper editorial, for example, as learning tools.

This situation provides for a dynamic learning environment with the potential for rich and profound critical thinking for the class. The material must be managed well (a major faculty responsibility) in order to maintain an academic environment in which all aspects of a question are studied and none are set forth as doctrine or "the truth." We believe that it is especially crucial that our students "hear" a diverse group of voices in the material that they read, and that they actively use this material to develop their own "voice."

The lack of an established "canon" also allows for the presentation of a variety of problem sets for critical analysis. More importantly, it challenges both the students and the faculty leaders to discover appropriate and substantive connections in the material presented throughout the course. This, in turn, emphasizes reading for knowledge rather for information. For example, students are taught to read to discover the intent of the rhetor, to identify the thesis of the piece, to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the argument, and to find ways in which the material intersects with previously read articles. Understanding the information presented in the material becomes a means to an end rather than an end to itself.

The learning environment must, therefore, be one in which all stakeholders are willing to share the responsibility of thinking critically, analyzing, and synthesizing the material of the class. We decided we could manage this responsibility more effectively if every member of the class belonged to the same in-group. In this case, we believe that our in-group was defined by the shared goals, motivations, hardships and successes of the students and faculty as they tried to discern the facts and opinions of material to see how it adds to the understanding of cultural diversity. We believe that we were successful in creating a learning in-group for those students who remained in the Spring 2006 class by identifying and applying lessons learned in our spring 2005 class. As an example, one student who did poorly on the first test came very close to dropping the class. She decided not to do so and finished the class with a grade of B. At the end of the class, she submitted the following unsolicited comment:

". . . I wondered if taking classes would be too much for me to handle . . . I wanted to thank both of you for the added motivation and inspiration that you provided to me throughout the spring semester . . . You both showed me how to embrace what I've done in the past and how it could be an asset instead of a liability. Again, I wanted to thank you both and I will continue to strive for excellence . . . "

PERFORMANCE

Successful achievement of the learning outcomes for the cultural diversity course requires that students master the ability to think critically about the material encountered in the course and integrate their disciplined thinking into the matrix of systems and diverse cultures represented in the United States. Substantive participation in the learning in-group for the course makes the difference between a seemingly impossible goal and an achievable set of progressively more complex tasks leading to a deeper understanding of cultural diversity in America. Techniques that worked well in the formation and maintenance of the in-group are outlined below:

A. Rubrics were developed for each required course task. The development of each rubric by the faculty included the crucial step of sharing rubrics in development with other interested faculty colleagues for their input and suggestions, thereby including these other colleagues in our class in-group. The rubrics developed showed clearer, stronger relationships to the anticipated learning outcomes with the input from faculty colleagues. This process was extended via presentations at the 2005 Community College Humanities Association conference and the Durham Technical Community College Teaching Learning Center.
B. Faculty regularly recognized the students' frustrations with the lack of "canon."
C. Class discussions were "continued" using the class web presence on Blackboard. Both faculty and students responded to comments from students on issues that were brought up in class. Teachers made a point of telling students several times that they had learned something new from the students. The faculty members then outlined the new learning, showing how the class (in-group)

had enhanced their understanding. Of course, all of these comments had to be genuine and substantive and not "manufactured" as window dressing for the class.

D. A Grid was developed, used on a regular basis and modified as needed.

E. Note taking in front of the class on a projected computer screen was modeled first by faculty and then turned over to student volunteers.

F. Activities were developed for the beginning of each class period for which students were responsible (e.g., writing responses to questions on whiteboards).

G. An early introduction to the concept of in-group was added to our Spring 2006 class.

An example of a project that was enhanced by extending the in-group to include students, other faculty colleagues, the campus community, and conference participants is the following project assignment:

In this class we have searched for the answers to these questions:

- What is America?
- Who is America?
- Why is America?
- To whom does America belong?

Throughout the semester we have endeavored to have discussions, conversations, thought development (through grids), readings, and research to assist us in answering these questions.

The purpose of this project is to provide an opportunity for each class member to express some thoughts and ideas visually about these questions in a manner that will "speak" to others.

Space in the display cases outside the library has been reserved for the items you will develop. Your "product" (the corporate culture informs all our discourse now!) will be evaluated based on the following guidelines (rubric):

1) A thought that expresses your conclusion about one of the above questions expressed clearly enough for the viewer (not just our class) to understand; these thoughts should be expressed in words and should be stated in the following way:
 - America belongs to [your thought here] or
 - America continues to exist because [your thought here] or
 - America is defined as [your thought here] or
 - America is [your thought about who makes up America here]

 Your thought should be expressed in fewer than 15 words in letters large enough to read from 10 feet away. You may use your own words or an appropriate quotation from poetry, song, essays, etc.

2) A visual component [collage, photo, drawing, "sign"]; please check with the instructors if you plan to use a three dimensional representation. Video or audio will not be appropriate for this display.

3) A "tie -in" with at least one of the concepts developed in class (frame of reference, ethnicity/race, gender, hero/myth, hierarchy/power, country of origin);

4) A clear connection with one of the systems we have discussed in class (media, healthcare, corporate world, educational system, criminal justice system, national security); and

5) A consideration of size (no larger than 2 feet x 2 feet and no smaller than 8 inches x 8 inches).

If you work with a partner, each person will receive a separate grade, but the grade will be the same for both people. You may also work alone.

On April 27, we will have a workday for the project. Your project should be well developed by this date, but you will have an opportunity to receive feedback and assistance from class members and instructors on that day. You should bring materials to work on your project. All projects are due at 9:30 am on May 2. Projects will be viewed in class that day during which time you will present your work to the class. No

projects will be accepted late except in an extreme emergency as defined by the instructors.

A pre-post assessment that asked students to reflect on changes in their answers to the questions posed by the project over the course of the semester was added to the Spring 2006 project.

Student performance was enhanced by the development of an in-group and the attempted elimination of out-group members. Students who did not do well in the class (C grade or lower) had the following problems:

- Academic "laziness;"
- Possible academic "depression;"
- Mismanagement of time commitments; and
- Failure to turn in assignments or failure to make required postings.

Our experience with the Spring 2005 class demonstrated that in addition to creating a learning in-group, we had to more clearly identify student responsibilities in the class. We also had to find a way to include students who are ethnically different from us in the academic in-group while legitimately sharing power between teachers and learners {O'Banion, as referenced by Krakauer, 2005) and maintaining the classroom power structure necessary to implement the agreed upon "agenda." We think that we more clearly met these objectives in our Spring 2006 class as shown by the following comments voluntarily submitted by students to the class discussion board after the completion of the semester:

". . . I am going to comment on how I thought the class was overall. I really liked the fact that I had two teachers for this class. I also like the fact that one teacher was a female and the other was a male, b/c I got to hear stories from two different perspectives. I felt honored to have the two teachers that I did, b/c they knew so much about the topics we discussed, and they could really draw you into what they were saying. You could tell that they were really into what they were teaching. They looked at things from other students' perspectives as well. The instructors did an excellent job this semester, and I would love to come back

next semester sometime to see how their class goes. Thank you for teaching me to look at America & other things in a different way. I will keep this with me for the rest of my life." (African-American Male with a grade of C)

"I believe that most important factor to have a successful classroom environment is mutual respect b/t student and instructor. The instructor has to take a non-bias approach towords his/her students and treat each indvidual as an equal. The instructor also has to be able to taylor the lecture in the best possible way to reach the students most effectively. As for the students, they must show the level of maturity that is expected in a college enviroment. They must make it clear to the instructor that they are interested in learning and willing to be an active participate in the classroom. I believe that both instructors went above and beyond in creating a positve enviorment. In return the students fed off that and mazimized their potential." [sic] (Indo-American male with grade of A)

"I think the class did a wonderful job of creating an atmosphere were people were free to express their own ideas respectfully and logically. This created a lot of very good discussions that I learned a lot from. I think the level of respect between the teachers and students were very good and it seemed like a discussion between peers and not student/ teacher, and I think that this allowed for a more relaxed atmosphere to exchange ideas. Overall, I think the class went extremely well overall and would recommend it to other students." (Canadian-American male with grade of A)

Lastly, the addition of our pre-post assessment component to the Spring 2006 class project allowed students to examine their own development over the course of the semester and provided an opportunity for the instructors to obtain another measure of students' analytical skills. Of the twenty-six students who submitted projects, four did not follow directions for the reflection paper and were graded down because of this. All other papers showed evidence of a maturation of students' ideas about the questions around which this course was constructed.

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ACA 111: A Thoughtful Approach to Student Success

Gabrielle McCutchen

Introduction

ACA 111: College Student Success is a one-credit hour course that teaches students how to improve their study skills, how to take advantage of Durham Technical Community College's campus resources, and how to discern what career best suits their skills and goals. Since Durham Tech students are sometimes under-prepared for college-level coursework and responsibilities, ACA 111 is a course that the college can implement campus-wide in order to help students prepare for and achieve academic success. The need for this course has been previously identified at the college and has been given the attention it needs to succeed from the Lumina Foundation's Achieving the Dream initiative. The development of ACA 111: College Student Success is only one part of a process of preparing students for their college coursework. The course is an integral part of the first year experience programs that are supported by Achieving the Dream. The course will enhance and expand the offerings of the recently developed college orientations, the updated advising systems, and the implementation of the Early Alert Initiative. Together, these first year programs will help retain and promote the success of every new student at Durham Tech.

From the very beginning of the project, ACA 111 was expected to successfully prepare students for college coursework. Previous three-credit hour first year courses at Durham Tech had done just that. But the College Student Success classes that were piloted as part of this research project were one-credit courses that historically had not been offered at the college. As a result, the best instructional methods to successfully prepare students were unknown.

The purpose of this project was to systematically implement and observe best practices in instructional delivery methods in order to develop a model ACA 111: College Student Success course tailored to meet the needs of Durham Tech's students. The project specifically examined the

various instructional delivery methods that might be used to teach the course. Three sections of the College Student Success course were piloted in the spring 2006 semester. One section was offered in the traditional sixteen-week format; it met once a week for fifty minutes. Another section met during the first mini session of the semester once a week for 100 minutes. The third section met during the second mini session and was a hybrid course; therefore, the class met once a week for fifty minutes, and the students completed another fifty minutes of course-work via the class's Blackboard site.

Literature Review

While many colleges and universities are only beginning to examine the ways in which they engage (or fail to engage) their first year students, the movement that is known as the "first year experience" has been in existence for the last thirty years. The most common program offered as part of the first year experience is the one-credit hour first year seminar (Barefoot, et al, 2005).

As the number of higher education institutions that offer first year seminar courses such as ACA 111 increases, research indicates these courses improve retention and graduation rates for course participants (Tobolowsky, 2005). In fact, at Moraine Valley Community College, 90% of the 1,070 students who completed a first year seminar in fall 2002 re-enrolled in courses in spring 2003. On the other hand, of the students who did not take the first year seminar course in fall 2002, less than 75% persisted to the next semester (Community College's Award-Winning Program Starts Students Off Right, 2004).

Some of the most current data on first year seminars taught at community colleges across the country is available in The 2003 National Survey on First Year Seminars. While the author of the report on the survey results is careful to state that the survey findings are not necessarily recommendations, the trends that the survey reveals are useful to an institution of higher learning, such as Durham Tech, that is in the process of making important decisions about its own first year seminar. According to the survey, in which 163 community colleges from around the country participated, the three most often identified first year course

objectives were (1) develop academic skills, (2) provide orientation to campus resources, and (3) encourage self-exploration. These objectives reflect the three points of focus in Durham Tech's ACA 111. The survey also reveals that 21.6% of the participating two-year institutions "offered all or part of the seminars online." Although the survey asked the question of how technology is being used in first year seminars, the survey administrator recognizes that "more in-depth research is needed on the use of technology in first year seminars" (Tobolowsky, 2005). The project described here helps fill the gap in the research on the impact of hybrid instruction on student persistence and performance in a first year seminar.

The First Year Initiative 2001 National Benchmarking Survey of first year seminars offered at two year and four year colleges investigated the impact of the number of credit hours on the effectiveness of the course. The data from this survey show that two-contact hour first year courses are more successful than one-contact hour courses, such as ACA 111: College Student Success, in meeting the following learning outcomes: improving study strategies, improving connections between students and faculty, improving connections between students and their peers, and increasing out-of-class engagement. While the number of contact hours provided to a first year course is a political, financial, and curricular decision, the potential to meet learning outcomes is critical to the decision of how many contact hours are given to a first year course. The data from the survey "confirm the common wisdom applied to first-year seminars that one-contact hour is better than none, two are better than one, and three are better than one or two" (Swing, 2002).

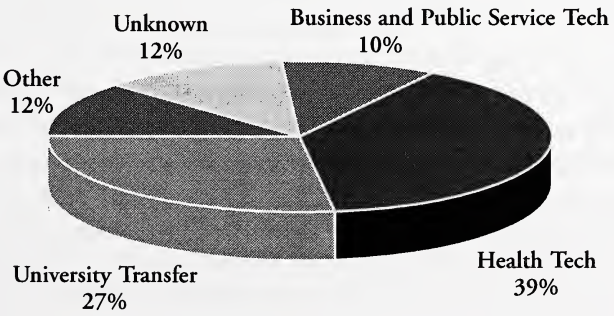
Methodology

The methodology used in this project was action research, a process that is recognized as being transformative, participatory, and contextual (Burns, 1999; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Lewin, 1958). The two purposes of action research as identified by Carr and Kemmis (1986) are (1) to improve practices, understanding of those practices, and the situations in which the practices occur, and (2) to involve in the research the individuals who engage regularly in those practices. These purposes reflect the transformational and contextual aspects of action research in efforts to

improve practices and situations, and the participatory nature in the aim to involve participants. The practice that was under investigation and in need of transformation in this research was the use of specific instructional delivery methods to teach College Student Success. Since students and instructors are regular participants in the implementation of any class, they were the participants in this action research project.

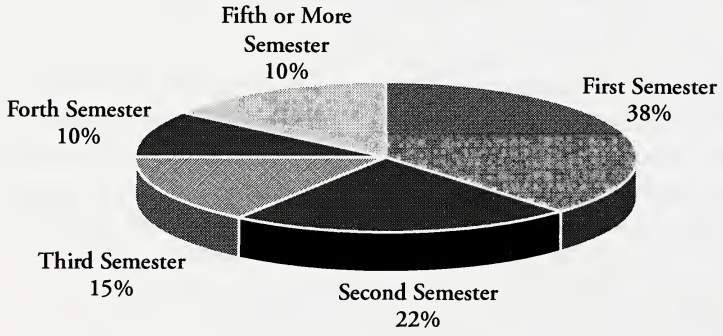
The research participants were the 41 new and returning Durham Tech students who enrolled in ACA 111 in spring 2006 and the instructor of the three pilot classes. The classes were marketed primarily toward students enrolled in or on waitlists for Health Technology programs, but no students were restricted from enrolling in the course. Sixteen students were enrolled in Health Technology programs; eleven students were in University Transfer programs; five students either did not indicate a program or stopped coming to class before the intake form was administered on the second day of the sixteen week traditional format section; five students were classified as "other" because they were either dual enrolled at both local high schools and Durham Tech or they were planning to transfer to Pitt Community College to complete their academic programs; and four students were enrolled in Business and Public Services Technology programs. The programs represented the research participants are shown in the graph below.

Graph 1: Students by Program



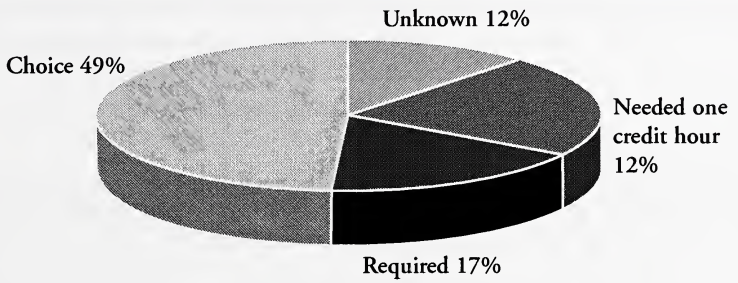
While most of the students who enrolled in the College Student Success course during the pilot period were new to the college, some students had more experience in a college setting. Sixteen students were in their first semester at Durham Tech; nine were in their second semester; six were in their third semester; four were in their fourth semester; and six were in their fifth or more semester. The graph below shows how many students had been at Durham Tech for how many semesters.

Graph 2: Students by Number of Semesters



In its pilot period, the College Student Success course was not required by any program on campus, and twenty students enrolled in the class voluntarily. However, some Nursing advisors required the course for their advisees who were waiting to be re-admitted to the Nursing program after poor academic performance. Also, the course is required for other community college programs in the state, and some students took the course at Durham Tech to meet the requirement at the other college. Seven students total indicated that they were required to take the course. Nine students also indicated on a course intake form that they needed an additional credit hour in order to be enrolled full time or to meet financial aid standards. Finally, five students either left this section of the intake form blank or never completed the intake form. The graph below indicates specifically how many students enrolled in the class for what reason.

Graph 3: Students by Reason for Enrolling in the Course



Action research is frequently described as a cycle of transformation (Burns, 1999; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Lewin, 1958). In the first stage, participants identify the problem or issue and construct a plan to address the problem. The problem was identified by analysis of the data collected as part of the Achieving the Dream initiative. Specifically, 25% of the students who enrolled in the fall 2004 Achieving the Dream cohort did not re-enroll in spring 2005. Likewise, 28% of the students who enrolled in the fall 2005 cohort did not re-enroll in spring 2006. The four Achieving the Dream initiatives that were identified in fall 2005 were developed at Durham Tech in order to enhance the first year experience of Durham Tech students and to address this problem of retention. Specifically, ACA 111: College Student Success will provide students with the tools they need to be successful in college. The plan for this research was to offer three different pilot sections that used three different instructional delivery methods.

In the second stage of the research, participants put their discourse into practice by taking action. As stated previously, the three sections were offered in spring 2006. During the pilot semester, I collected data on student demographics, motivations for taking the course, and academic performance. Likewise, I kept records of students' anecdotal comments regarding the course and copies of their classroom products that referenced their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the course. Twice in the semester, I gave students the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the course.

And in the final stage, participants observe the effects of their action and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the plan, implementation of the plan, and their observations. As I collected the data on the classes and the student participants, I looked for trends, themes, and patterns. At the end of the semester, I could add another layer of analysis by examining rates of persistence and success. I compared these two end results across student demographics, student motivations for taking the course, and other criteria. Since one purpose of the course is to improve retention and performance in first year students, the participants' future enrollment and grades will also be important features to analyze.

After a period of reflection, the action research cycle is initiated again; the process is a continual spiral of action and reflection, practice and discourse. For the purposes of this project, however, the cycle of reflection and action ends with the analysis of the data collected from the three pilot classes and the recommendations outlined in this report. This project is not an example of true unending action research; to continue the cycle indefinitely is beyond the scope of this research.

Results

Student Persistence and Grades

Students who persisted in the pilot sections of ACA 111: College Student Success were those who completed the course and earned a grade other than an F2 (which indicates that a student was absent for more than the allowed 15% of class meetings) or a W (which indicates that a student withdrew from the class within the drop period for the semester). In the three pilot classes (16-week traditional, Mini Session 1, Mini Session 2 Hybrid), the Mini Session 2 Hybrid course had the highest percentage of students who completed the course. Of the eleven who enrolled in the course, ten students completed the semester. The one student who withdrew from the class did so for health reasons; she indicated a strong desire to finish and regret that she could not. Likewise, the section with the highest percentage of students who passed the class with an A, B, or C was also the Mini Session 2 Hybrid with 73% of the students earning these final grades. The class with the second best rate of persistence and the second highest percentage of students who earned an A, B, or C was the Mini Session 1 section. Finally, the 16-week

traditional section had the lowest rate of retention and the lowest rate of success. Of the three pilot sections, the students in the two Mini Sessions persisted and succeeded at higher rates. See the tables below for the specific numbers.

Table 1: Persistence by Section

	Completers	Non-completers
16-week traditional	52% n=11	48% n=10
Mini Session 1	67% n=6	33% n=3
Mini Session 2 Hybrid	91% n=10	9% n=1

Table 2: Success by Section

	A's	B's	C's	D's	F2's	W's
16-week traditional	24% n=5	19% n=4	5% n=1	5% n=1	33% n=7	14% n=3
Mini Session 1	45% n=4	22% n=2			11% n=1	22% n=2
Mini Session 2 Hybrid	27% n=3	37% n=4	9% n=1	18% n=2		9% n=1

When the rates of persistence and performance are compared across student genders, a significant contrast results. Of the 23 female students who participated in the pilot sections of ACA 111, 19 completed the class, and 18 passed the class with an A, B, or C. On the other hand, of the 18 male students, only 6 completed the class and passed the class with an A, B, or C. All of the F2 final grades were earned by male students; in fact, 44% of the male students earned an F2 in the course. Clearly, the classes did not engage or retain the male students adequately. The tables below illustrate the female and male students' persistence and success in the course.

Table 3: Persistence by Gender

	Completers	Non-completers
Female Students	83% n=19	17% n=4
Male Students	44% n=8	56% n=10

Table 4: Success by Gender

	A's	B's	C's	D's	F2's	W's
Female Students	39% n=9	30% n=7	9% n=2	4% n=1		17% n=4
Male Students	17% n=3	17% n=3		11% n=2	44% n=8	11% n=2

Students indicated on their initial intake forms one of four reasons for taking College Student Success. The students that persisted at higher rates were the students who indicated that they were required to take the course. This entire group passed the class with an A, B, or C, and only one student in this group withdrew. The students in this group were not only required to take ACA 111, but they also had specific programs that they wanted to pursue and specific degrees that they planned to earn. In addition to the requirement, these students may have been equally motivated by their specific educational goals. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the students that either did not indicate a reason for taking the class or were absent on the day the student intake form was administered (and never came back to class to complete the form at a later date) persisted and performed at the lowest rate. Of these five students, only one finished the course, and he earned a D. The tables below indicate persistence and grades for all groups.

Table 5: Persistence by Reason for Enrolling

	Completers	Non-completers
Choice	70% n=14	30% n=6
Needed One Credit Hour	67% n=6	33% n=3
Required	86% n=6	14% n=1
Unknown	20% n=1	80% n=4

Table 6: Success by Reason for Enrolling

	A's	B's	C's	D's	F2's	W's
Choice	35% n=7	20% n=4	5% n=1	10% n=2	15% n=4	15% n=4
Needed One Credit Hour	22% n=2	44% n=4			22% n=2	11% n=1
Required	43% n=3	29% n=2	14% n=1			14% n=1
Unknown				20% n=1	60% n=3	20% n=1

The fourth performance indicator used to compare and contrast student persistence and performance was the number of semesters students had been enrolled in classes at Durham Tech. The ACA 111: College Student Success course was created and marketed for first year students, specifically, students in their first semester of college. As a result, 16 of the 41 students (40%) who enrolled in the pilot classes were in their first semester at Durham Tech. Nine students were in their second semester; six students were in their third semester; four students were in their fourth semester; and six students were in their fifth or more semester. In fact, two students were in their eighth semester at Durham Tech (one earned a B, the other an F2). The tables below show the rates of persistence and final grades for each group.

Table 7: Persistence by Number of Semesters

	Completers	Non-completers
First	63% n=10	37% n=6
Second	78% n=7	22% n=2
Third	50% n=3	50% n=3
Fourth	75% n=3	25% n=1
Fifth or More	67% n=4	23% n=2

Table 8: Success by Number of Semesters

	A's	B's	C's	D's	F2's	W's
First	18% n=3	25% n=4	6% n=1	13% n=2	25% n=4	13% n=2
Second	56% n=5	11% n=1		11% n=1	22% n=2	
Third		50% n=3			17% n=1	33% n=2
Fourth	50% n=2		25% n=1			25% n=1
Fifth or More	33% n=2	33% n=2			17% n=1	17% n=1

Student Satisfaction with the Course

Students were given multiple formal and informal opportunities to indicate their satisfaction with the course. Students in each pilot section completed midterm and final course evaluations which asked students to first indicate their level of agreement on a Likert scale with statements about the course and then asked students to write short answers about their opinions on different aspects of the course. The Likert scale asked students to circle one of the following levels of agreement:

(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
strongly agree	agree	no opinion	disagree	strongly disagree

The statements are listed in the table below. Additionally, students gave prompted and unprompted feedback about the course before, during, and after class meetings. These anecdotes were recorded by the instructor. Overall, student feedback regarding the course content, assignments, and delivery methods was positive.

The table below shows the average (x) student response to questions on the final course evaluation. It also shows the standard deviation (s) for the responses to each question. Of the eleven students who completed the 16-week traditional format class, only nine of them turned in the final course evaluation. On the other hand, all of the students in Mini Session 1 and Mini Session 2 Hybrid who completed the course submitted the final course evaluation. The evaluation for Mini Session 2 Hybrid was on the class's Blackboard website; students completed it anonymously. Students in 16-week traditional format and Mini Session 1 were asked not to write their names on their evaluations, but some did, and they all had to turn in the evaluations in a face-to-face meeting.

Table 9: Final Course Evaluations Results

Statement	16-week traditional n=9		Mini Session 1 n=6		Mini Session 2 Hybrid n=10	
	x	s	x	s	x	s
1. This class helped me understand and use my learning style.	4.67	0.71	4.83	0.41	4.70	0.67
2. This class helped me read my textbooks and other course materials more effectively.	4.44	0.53	4.83	0.41	4.50	0.53
3. This class helped me listen actively in my courses.	4.44	0.73	4.83	0.41	4.20	0.79
4. This class helped me use memory strategies to remember important information in my classes.	4.67	0.50	4.50	0.84	4.50	0.53
5. This class helped me take useful notes.	4.56	0.73	4.50	0.84	4.10	0.99
6. This class helped me prepare for tests.	4.33	0.71	4.83	0.41	4.30	0.95
7. This class helped me reduce any anxiety I may feel before or during tests.	4.33	0.71	4.50	0.84	3.70	0.95
8. This class helped me manage my time effectively.	4.56	0.53	5.00	0.00	4.20	0.92
9. This class helped me understand services available to me on Durham Tech's campus.	4.56	0.53	5.00	0.00	4.80	0.42
10. This class helped me understand my program and its Plan of Study.	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00	3.90	1.37
11. This class helped me reflect on my career choice.	4.67	0.50	5.00	0.00	4.20	1.23
12. This class helped me set reasonable goals for myself.	4.67	0.50	5.00	0.00	4.80	0.42

Although many of the learning outcomes listed in the statements above were presented in similar fashions, some generated very different levels of satisfaction from the students. For example, item 10 asked students to indicate how well the course helped them understand their academic program and its Plan of Study. While the students in the traditional 16-week format and Mini Session 1 indicated strong agreement, the students in the Mini Session 2 Hybrid did not strongly agree with that statement. In fact, one student indicated that he or she strongly disagreed with the statement. Three of the students who completed the Mini Session 2 Hybrid course were dual enrolled in both local high schools and Durham Tech. None of them planned to attend Durham Tech when he or she graduated from high school, so the classroom and online activities designed to help students investigate their programs and plans of study were of little interest to these students. This may be one explanation for the data. Likewise, item 7 generated varied responses. Again, students in the Mini Session 2 Hybrid section indicated less satisfaction with the ways in which the class was designed to help students learn to cope with test anxiety. While students in the other two sections expressed some nervousness related to test taking, there were two students in the Mini Session 2 Hybrid who stated that they suffered from extreme test anxiety that had made them physically sick. These students may have needed more information on reducing test anxiety than the strategies that were presented in the course. One item that students across sections indicated general satisfaction with was item 9: "This class helped me understand services available to me on Durham Tech's campus." While the Mini Session 2 Hybrid section utilized the Durham Tech web site more than the other sections, instruction on this key learning outcome in all three pilot sections was successful.

In addition to the constructed response questions on the midterm and final course evaluations, students were also asked to write their comments on specific assignments and activities and general likes and dislikes about the class. One aspect of the class that students in each pilot section appreciated was the opportunity for class discussion, group activities, and other interactions with classmates. Five students in the 16-week traditional section indicated on the final course evaluation that they liked getting to interact with their peers during the class. Two students

in the Mini Session 1 and three students in the Mini Session 2 Hybrid indicated the same on their final course evaluations. Anecdotally, students also mentioned before and after class how much they enjoyed the discussions and group work involved in the course.

The most common complaint that students indicated on their course evaluations and made orally during the pilot semester was that there was not enough class time. Students in the 16-week traditional section often said that the fifty-minute class was too short and hurried. Students often felt frustrated when they had to stop working on a class activity because the time had run out quickly. On the other hand, students in the Mini Session 1 section never indicated on a course evaluation that they were dissatisfied with the 100-minute daily class meetings. At the end of the eight-week term, only two students said that they wished the class lasted the length of the entire semester. And in the Mini Session 2 Hybrid section, only one student indicated on a course evaluation that he or she wished the class meetings were longer and that there were fewer online expectations. Most Mini Session 2 Hybrid students were satisfied with the length of the class meetings and the amount of work they were expected to complete online. None of the students in any of the pilot sections expressed the desire that the class be shorter.

Discussion

Summary of Recommendations

The mandate for this action research project came from the desire to know what format and instructional delivery method would best promote student success at Durham Tech. Based on the rates of persistence and success as well as the levels of student satisfaction across the three pilot sections, the first recommendation that emerges from the research is to offer the course in a condensed format, such as the Mini Session format. Whether the course is a hybrid or not, the 8-week format was long enough to cover the key concepts of the course and short enough for students to remain engaged in the class. With the Mini Session format, the class meetings can be longer; therefore, there is enough time in one class meeting to prepare for, complete, and debrief a meaningful activity.

A second recommendation based on the data collected and analyzed in this research is to consider offering ACA 115 instead of ACA 111. ACA 115 is also a one credit hour course, so students would not be deterred by a higher tuition cost, but it is a two contact hour course. This additional contact would give students more opportunities to benefit from and enjoy class discussions and group work. Likewise, some of the content that was assigned as homework or independent study in ACA 111 could be explored in the extended class meetings. As the college continues to define what competencies its first year students will be expected to master and instruction of these competencies is expected to occur in the College Student Success course, more time may be needed in the course to address the additional course topics.

Thirdly, students should be encouraged to take the course in their first year of college. While it is preferable for students to participate in their first semester, there are opportunities for second semester students to reflect on what academic success strategies did or did not work for them in their first semester of college. Beyond the second semester, however, it may become more difficult to engage students in the subject matter because they feel (right or wrong) that they have already learned what they need to know to be successful. The first day of class should be used primarily to generate student buy-in and to engage all students. Many of the male students who did not complete the course stopped coming after the first or second class meeting. Therefore, on the first day, students should be actively involved in activities that help them recognize their need for the class and the benefits it can bring them.

Finally, while the students who were required to take the class persisted and performed at higher rates than other students, the course should not be required of all students immediately. There is great opportunity for the class to gain momentum and recruit students via word of mouth. As more students take the course and feel that they have benefited from the course, more students will be interested in enrolling. If the course is required, students may begin to resent the requirement and not allow themselves to profit from instruction. That said, there may be some populations of students who benefit from the requirement. If the course is required for any group of students, it will be important for the course not to be perceived as a punishment for poor academic performance.

Limitations to the Research

Although the research presented here is valuable to both stakeholders at Durham Tech and advocates for first year students, there are some limitations to the findings. One of the most significant limitations is the small number of participants in the three pilot classes and the small number of pilot classes. The course had not been previously offered, and some students might not have even known about the course. Even students who did know about the course might have been reluctant to enroll in the course since it is not required or an elective on any plans of study for Durham Tech programs. Because of these factors, the number of students who participated in the pilot sections was low. Another limitation to the comparisons that can be made between the different sections is the fact that the numbers of students in each section were uneven. While there were twenty-one students in the 16-week traditional section, only nine students enrolled in the Mini Session 1 section, and only eleven students enrolled in the Mini Session 2 Hybrid. The sections could be more reliably compared if there had been equal numbers of students enrolled in each section. A third limitation to the research was that there were no previous ACA 111 courses offered at Durham Tech to compare results with. The results of this research might have been more significant if the rates of persistence and success among students in the three pilot classes could be compared with rates of persistence and success among students in previous ACA 111 classes.

Future Research Opportunities

Since first year seminars or college success courses are offered to students to improve their persistence and success in college, the biggest opportunity for continued research is to track students in future coursework. This soon after the pilot sections ended, the only data available on students who participated in the pilot sections are their grades in ACA 111, their grades in other courses during the pilot semester, and their grades before they took the course. Now that these students have studied strategies for college success, it will be interesting to observe their rates of re-enrollment and success at Durham Tech.

A second opportunity for future research is to replicate the research in another semester to test the reliability of the findings in this project. The

replication study could include the same three formats offered at the same times in the semester, or it could offer the Mini Session Hybrid during the first Mini Session in order to examine more carefully why students in that section were so successful. Students may have been successful because of the online learning component, or they may have succeeded because they recognized in the first eight weeks of the semester that they needed additional instruction in study skills. By offering the Mini Session Hybrid section at a different point in the semester, it would be possible to isolate the reason for success. Even without data on future persistence and success of the students who participated in the pilot sections of ACA 111, the research described here will be useful to stakeholders at Durham Tech who have the opportunity to improve the first year experience of students through the implementation of ACA 111: College Student Success and the other Achieving the Dream initiatives.

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